



WOLFGANG POHRT 2024-01-24

## CAPITALISM FOREVER (EXCERPT)

NECROPOLITICS CAPITALISM, FEEDING, LEFT, MARXISM, REVOLUTION

So the fact is that later developments turned the beginnings of the protest movement into a childish illusion. But this childish illusion was also a vision that could have turned out to be history-making. It was a real force that made it possible to fight for the tiny cosmetic changes that are generally appreciated. Woodstock and the protest against the Vietnam War are connected.

But of course any movement that works is a pretty complicated thing. For it to work, people with very different desires must be able to identify with the main demands. This was brilliantly achieved in Stuttgart with the protests against the planned railway station tomb. The battle slogan shouted at rallies and demonstrations was simply "Stay up!"

Simply brilliant. “Stay up!” – that is the categorical imperative of all established people. That’s how the better-off, who live in semi-high altitude, think above the car exhaust fumes and the rabble. That’s how the middle class, threatened by relegation, think. That’s how everyone who still has one below them thinks.

I used to think that I was only interested in not having to feel like a sewer rat in a pneumatic tube when travelling by train. The train is the only mode of transport that allows you to doze off and enjoy the passing scenery, and I love that.

In the meantime, I’m not so sure of myself anymore. I saw too many people from my age group at the demonstrations. And as a pensioner, perhaps without realising it yourself, you recognise a deeper meaning in the slogan “Stay up!”, as deep as the pit, like the grave that awaits you. “Stay up!” – is how it sounds from a thousand throats when the old man becomes the defiant one again because he doesn’t want to bite the dust. And then the railway boss who is cramming through S21 is also called “Grube”. No wonder he’s not popular with pensioners.

That’s the way it is with movements. You don’t know what the others want – that would still be understandable. Worse: you don’t even know exactly what you want yourself and which strings were struck in your own chest. A plausible rationalisation is of course easy to come up with, especially as a professional in the Sinn & Bedeutung industry. But the real motives and the driving force often lie much deeper and hidden.

And of course you don’t know what the end result of such a movement will be. It is often the opposite of what was intended. In Stuttgart, for example, there are two evils instead of just one, so it’s not just the station vault alone, but the station vault + Kretschmann. Who knows what it’s good for. A poster was held up at one of the numerous demonstrations. It read: “Mappus was arrogant. Kretschmann is pathetic.” The realisation was that the Greens will eat out of anyone’s hand for a ministerial office. And they eat everything, not just organic food. The paths to wisdom are often arduous and thorny. And expensive. Perhaps the cost of the billion-dollar crypt should be recognised under the heading of public education costs.

The present is ridiculous, the past was not, comparatively speaking. The Mao overalls and the Che Guevara berets back then, for example, were not ridiculous, but rather youthful folly; the protagonists were at an age when people liked to dress fashionably. It only becomes ridiculous when today’s ageing veterans do the Mainzelmännchen themselves and allow themselves to be photographed and depicted for newspapers, something they didn’t do when they were still young.

But the ageism that can be observed so often today, on television with Heiner Geißler or in the opinion industry and in the writing profession, is probably an inevitable decadence phenomenon that accompanies ageing populations, magnificently described by P.D. James in her novel “The Land of Empty Houses”. The over-30 parties already exist, the over-60 parties will follow. One person who saw this early on and captured it in an image was Roman Polanski in his “Dance of the Vampires”. The creepy-comic ball scene at the end of the film turns out to be prophetic forty years later.

I used to despise pensioners, people who don’t want to do anything other than retire and

grow very old. The very thought of retirement, even the word, was a horror to me. And now I'm one of these vegetating mummies myself. But the punchline is yet to come: I realise that this is exactly what I've actually been all my life, apart from the short period of time when the prospect of such a shabby life was the motive for protesting against society, imperialism and whatnot, a motive that I later lost sight of somewhere between Marx and Murks, for which I ended up paying the price.

It's about the un-lived life. The protest against this was the driving force behind the resistance actions against emergency laws, institutional regulations and all the stuff that we no longer remember. You bit into every bone that was thrown at you.

In the part of Stuttgart's Schlosspark that is soon to become a building pit, Robin Wood boys have built tree huts at dizzying heights. The trees themselves are supposed to be defended and a tiny animal called the "Juchtenkäfer", which I have never seen, supposedly lives there. Ridiculous. As ridiculous as our actions against emergency laws and institutional regulations back then.

But for the boys up in the trees, especially in summer, it's a nice time, a reprieve before they dive into the lifelong treadmill from which there will be no escape, and perhaps a last flicker of resistance against it. And if I were to rub these guys' nonsense and the futility of their actions in their faces, it would be like spitting into the last meal of a man sentenced to death or telling him that he won't have time to digest it anyway.

Because the social deformation of individuals goes much deeper and repeatedly confirms Adorno's words that there is no right life in the wrong one, cabaret and satire become dull and bland. Taking the mickey out of Merkel only makes sense if the result is a realisation of just how out of touch we have become ourselves and that we didn't need Merkel for this. You can do that all by yourself. Denunciation without self-denunciation is boring.

Unfortunately, the latter is shunned and avoided. Nobody wants to clean up after themselves. On the contrary, a certain complacency can be observed, especially in retrospect. Publishers such as Edition Tiamat in Berlin, Konkret in Hamburg, Ça Ira with the IFS in Freiburg, and also the taz – all of them and others have been around for thirty years or more, they have lasted this long, half an eternity. Wherever they are based, they are already part of the tradition, local folklore and cultural heritage; over the years, they have become a particle of what the protest movement labelled the "establishment" with the deepest contempt. They are a frequency in the monotonous background noise of the ensemble. And I observe with interest how their own perseverance fills the owners or those involved with unmistakable pride, where it would actually be appropriate to lament. Even company anniversaries are celebrated, like at Siemens or Bosch. It was supposed to be a revolution, and then it became a paper spinner in continuous operation. Is that really so great? Isn't it miserable to take stock and realise that you've been doing the same thing for thirty years with nothing more than life support and no prospect of things ever changing?

And isn't it symptomatic that this obvious thought is rigorously suppressed today? That today we feel caressed to the stomach by the very mendacious and imbecilic eulogies that are produced on the occasion of such anniversaries, these lifetime obituaries, which in the past would have triggered a fit of laughter? A title by Christian Schultz-Gerstein comes to mind,

only the title, I don't even remember what it was about: "Wreath ribbons for life." Brilliant.

What is the pride in perseverance other than a retrospective abandonment of all revolutionary hopes, and all the hopes of youth in general? Does this not reflect the philosophy of life of the resigned philistine, namely "Persevere!", regardless of whether you dress up in Marxist, critical, avant-garde, situationist, Dadaist, capitalist or any other costume?

If you want to achieve something, you run the risk of failing. Anyone who argues or fights runs the risk of losing. Anyone who wanted to fight for a different world fifty years ago failed and lost. We should not be ashamed of our defeats. On the contrary, they prove that we once wanted something different from what we have today.

But you shouldn't hang yourself with consolation prizes. They prove the opposite. But this is not a new realisation, as I wrote back in 1976:

"The more fortunate among those who once radically questioned schools and universities, who proclaimed the abolition of the lecturer in active strikes and practised the self-organisation of studies, and who discussed the superfluity of the elementary school teacher on the basis of the theses of II Manifesto – they have now become teachers in schools or universities themselves. So those who would once have indignantly rejected the imposition of contributing to the functioning of the bad whole through their work in the institutions of this society, and at the price of becoming a shooting gallery figure with thinning hair, an embittered soul, an iron sense of duty and limp limbs in the daily grind of the bourgeois profession – they are all either civil servants or impoverished, disqualified, broken, imprisoned or dead. Those who got away, some of whom did not pursue the revolution without the reassurance of a proper degree, some of whom initiated their academic resocialisation in good time, but most of whom were simply lucky – they fared no differently than all those in this society who still have the courage to want something substantial: they ended up as failed existences. You can't blame them for that, but you can blame them for suppressing their unhappy awareness of it.

What is striking is the iron curtain of optimism that is defended like a fortress and makes any understanding impossible. Without quite realising it, the professional left have adopted from the institutions they believe they are undermining their peculiar relationship to the rest of the world. What is wrong with it is reduced to the functional. The world's disorder only appears in the form in which the institutions define it: as an object of the makers and organisers. In this relationship to the underprivileged, but especially in this relationship to oneself, all everyday experiences are blocked, the radicality of which would prove the revolution to be a living necessity: horror, disgust, horror. The inability to recognise in oneself the bleak fate of a failed existence corresponds to the ability to chalk up the fact that one has helped a few poor devils to alms according to the Federal Welfare Act as a sense of achievement with obvious satisfaction. The hardening against oneself corresponds to the social welfare relationship to other people. Its icy coldness is the prerequisite for giving the deformed a friendly pat on the back. They do not need to be taken seriously as objects. Disgust and horror, which would strike at the essence of their existence as well as one's own, can therefore be spared. The left has also adopted the manipulative gaze of the institutions as the sterility of their own experience. Their unconditional philanthropy owes less to political conviction than to the fact

that it is a requirement of professional life: as a teacher, one is forced to get along with the students, even if it means ingratiating them.”

Yet more proof of how little times have changed.

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